

The Department of Defense today committed more than \$2.1 million for a one-year extension of a Vermont National Guard outreach program to help veterans returning from deployments in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

The Vermont Guard program was funded since 2006 by federal grants secured by Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. With continued funding for the program in jeopardy, a Sanders provision was added to a 2011 Pentagon appropriations bill that designated \$16 million for Vermont and seven other states.

Sens. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and Sanders and Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) asked Army Secretary John M. McHugh and Gen. Craig McKinley, chief of the National Guard Bureau, to use the \$16 million to continue the program under a national Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program.

"When our soldiers come home from Iraq and Afghanistan it is important that we do everything that we can to protect them and their families and ease their transition back into civilian life," Sanders said. "I am proud that the Vermont outreach program has become a model for the nation and that we are able to continue to fund it."

"I'm pleased that the Pentagon has found money for this necessary program," Leahy said. "Too many of our Vermont Guard members face the burdens and strains of combat and do not know where to go to find help. Unlike active duty troops in other states, they live far from military bases and ready access to that help. The Defense Department should leverage any creative program already designed to solve this problem, and this allocation of funds demonstrates that Vermont and our Guard once again are on the cutting edge."

"This is great news for Guard members and their families," Welch said. "This program is so effective because Guard members do not have to seek out help – help is offered to them by trained veterans who can relate to their lives and know their struggles. Securing this funding ensures these services will continue to help those Vermonters who routinely put their lives on the line."

The Vermont program became a model for other states. A front-page [article](#) last year in Stars and Stripes described the Vermont program as a model for the nation.

The Vermont congressional delegation spearheaded the bipartisan campaign to gain the support of other congressional delegations to keep the outreach programs running.

Their [letter](#) to the Pentagon said the Vermont program and similar efforts in other states

Vermont Guard Wins \$2 Million More for Model Veterans Outreach Program

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provided Guard families access to health care services, marriage and financial counseling, substance abuse treatment and other services that are critically important to Guard members returning from deployments. About 1,500 Vermont National Guard members came home last December and January from a one-year deployment in Afghanistan.